ARKEOS

Perspectivas em diálogo

Arte Rupestre do Vale do Tejo

e outros Estudos de Arte Pré-histórica

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ARTE RUPESTRE DO VALE DO TEJO E OUTROS ESTUDOS DE ARTE PRÉ-HISTÓRICA

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"BEINGS LIKE THEMSELVES"? ANTHROPOMORPHIC REPRESENTATIONS IN THE MEGALITHIC TOMBS OF FRANCE

CHRIS SCARRE

> "There is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious."
>
> David Hume *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* 1779

In 1918, a curious discovery was made within Le Déhus, a megalithic tomb on the Channel Island of Guernsey. On the underside of the second capstone from the end of the chamber, the faintly worked image of a human figure was recognised (De Guérin 1919). Most striking was the face, with eyebrows, nose and moustache in low relief, completed by sunken eyes and mouth. Lower down were two five-stranded symbols probably to be identified as hands, while lower still was the shallow incision of an archer's bow, and what have sometimes been interpreted as a belt with attached hooks (Kinnes & Hibbs 1989). The distribution of these motifs across the slab made clear that the stone as a whole was meant to represent the human body, an effect enhanced by the narrowing of the block towards the 'face' end, where the natural shape of the stone appears to form a 'head'.

The Déhus carving is remarkable in a number of respects. First, it is surprising that the carving was not noticed for so many years, given that the tomb was first excavated in 1847. Second, the slab is clearly not in its original position, since the pillar that supports it also partly obscures

its decoration. Indeed, the presence of such a pillar in itself is an unusual feature in a monument of this kind, and draws our attention to the narrow fissure that crosses the under surface of the decorated capstone. The pillar was perhaps introduced by the builders to prevent the fracturing of the stone. In choosing to employ this fissured slab the builders cannot have been attracted by its mechanical strength but wmust have been motivated rather by the desire to incorporate the decorated block within the structure (Kinnes & Hibbs 1989, 162).

There is every reason to suppose that the decorated slab placed as a capstone at Le Déhus began life in a different location, or at the very least in a different context, probably as an anthropomorphic standing stone. Stylistically it is without parallel, and the subtly carved features gazing down from within the darkened confines of the tomb chamber make it an extraordinarily evocative image. In a broader sense, however, the Déhus slab is far from isolated, but forms part of a series of former standing stones – sometimes shaped, sometimes decorated, sometimes anthropomorphic – that were re-used in megalithic burial chambers across northwest France, the region to which the Channel Islands, though today part of the United Kingdom, essentially belong.

The recognition that megalithic tombs in Brittany incorporated blocks that could be recognised as statue-menhirs draws on observations made since the 19th century (e.g. De Closmadeuc 1873; De Mortillet 1894; Le Rouzic 1913; Minot 1965; L'Helgouach 1983, 1997). In 1913, the Breton archaeologist Zacharie Le Rouzic drew attention to the stones of ogival form in megalithic tombs of the Carnac region, several of which were carved or decorated. He likened them to human forms, and concluded that they should be classified as statue-menhirs (Le Rouzic 1913). Le Rouzic did not directly state that they were re-used standing stones, although he was clearly thinking in those terms when describing the Mané Lud floor slab as "couchée" (implying that it once stood upright). The argument was carried a stage further in 1965 when Minot demonstrated that many of the decorated slabs in Breton megalithic tombs could not have been carved *in situ* but must have been taken from

earlier monuments (Minot 1965). It was not until the 1980s, however, that the original character of these re-used blocks came to be widely recognised. The twin foundations of the new understanding were the reappraisal by Jean L'Helgouach of the Mané Rutual capstones, and the discovery by Charles-Tanguy Le Roux of carvings on the upper (hidden) face of the capstone of the famous Gavrinis passage grave.

The Mané Rutual capstone is a massive block of granite which, although broken at one end and snapped at the other, still measures almost 12 metres in length. On its underside is carved a symmetrical figure known variously as an *écusson* or *bouclier*, from its shield-type shape. Above the bouclier, at the apex of the slab, is another smaller carving. What is particularly striking about the Mané Rutual carvings is that they are on that part of the capstone which oversails the end of the chamber and was buried in the mound beyond. Thus the carvings could never have been visible once the stone was incorporated in the passage grave; indeed the massive slab appears to have been expressly positioned in such a way that the *écusson* motif was hidden from view. The surfaces of the stone have been carefully worked to give parallel sides and (before breakage) a regular rounded or pointed top; the other end of the stone, by contrast, had been left largely unworked. This unworked end was probably the base of the decorated menhir, which had originally been erected as a free-standing monolith (L'Helgouach 1983, 61). In addition to this massive chamber capstone, two of the smaller passage capstones at Mané Rutual also appear originally to have been free-standing menhirs; one of them carries a carved motif on its upper surface.

In the same year, 1983, excavations at the Gavrinis passage grave, only 4 kms east of Mané Rutual, revealed a series of carved motifs on the previously hidden upper surface of the capstone. These carvings included an enigmatic motif of the kind long referred to as the *hache-charrue* or 'axe plough' (recently argued to represent a whale: Whittle 2000; Cassen & Vaquero 2000). Below that motif was the carved outline of a curved-horn quadruped, probably a bovid, and below that again, the curved horns of a second animal and the upper line of its back, truncated

by the break at the edge of the stone. The truncated lines made an exact join with the quadruped on the capstone of La Table des Marchand, another passage grave close to Mané Rutual (Le Roux 1984, 1985). Thus is became clear that, originally, the capstones of La Table des Marchand and Gavrinis had together formed parts of a single large decorated menhir, at least 10 metres tall (Le Roux 1984, 241; 1985, 186). This had not been an anthropomorphic menhir. The stone in itself had not had a recognisably human profile, nor were the carvings representations of the human form. It did, however, provide graphic confirmation of Minot's observation that many of the carved stones in Breton passage graves had been re-used from earlier monuments. More specifically, it showed that they had originally been free-standing menhirs.

These discoveries prompted a reappraisal of the ogival slabs discussed by Le Rouzic seventy years before, and it became clear that many (if not all) of them had not been carved *in situ*. They had not been intended from the outset to be elements of megalithic tombs, but had been free-standing stones that were later toppled and sometimes broken up in what has on occasion been interpreted as a wave of Neolithic iconoclasm (L'Helgouach 1983; 1997). The destruction and re-use may be seen as evidence of the power of human imagery; formerly standing in the open and hence visible to all, these stones were now systematically demolished and hidden away within chambered tombs.

CARVED MOTIFS: THE STONE AS CANVAS

Not all of these early Breton menhirs, as we have seen, were overtly anthropomorphic. Among those that did embody the human form or human attributes, however, two categories can be distinguished. In first place were those stones that bore a human representation carved in outline or raised relief. A good example is the carved slab in the Ile Longue passage grave, which now stands as second orthostat on the left-hand side on entering the passage (L2 in Shee Twohig's classification:

Shee Twohig 1981, 172) (Fig. 1). Here the principal element is a deeply carved outline with rectangular lower part and domed top: the typical "buckler" motif of earlier writers. This is the same motif as that carved on the underside of the Mané Rutual capstone. An anthropomorphic interpretation might see it as a human face, with the loops to either side representing the ears, and the wavy lines the hair. Attention has sometimes been drawn to the slight notches that separate the curved top of the motif from its rectangular lower part. These may be intended to indicate shoulders, and to separate the head from the body (L'Helgouach 1993, 11). In that reading, the loops become arms (Luquet 1910).

For L'Helgouach, figures such as this (and there are no fewer than three more examples in Ile Longue alone) were the "représentation d'une puissance incontestable, divinité probable qui protège le monde des morts" (L'Helgouach 1993, 11). That statement raises a series of issues developing around the nature of the motifs and the context of their discovery. We might first question the anthropomorphic identification itself. If this indeed a representation of the human form, it is highly schematic in nature. There are no facial features, the body is merely a rectangular outline, and the head is barely separated from the trunk. The protuberance at the top of the 'head', which is a common feature of this series of motifs, is difficult to explain, and attempts to relate it back to similar features present on the Sesklo figures of Greece hardly carry conviction (L'Helgouach 1993, 11). Péquart & Le Rouzic eighty years ago listed a series of objections to the notion that they depicted human forms (Péquart & Le Rouzic 1927, 35).

So ambiguous is the anthropomorphic nature of these motifs that one recent review reinterprets them as representations not of head or body but of the phallus, the wavy lines representing human hair, the side loops the testes (Cassen 2000, 668ff). Even if we accept them as human representations, it is mere speculation that identifies them as divine or supernatural, or indeed as female. They might equally well represent living individuals or the recently dead, either male or female. Le Rouzic, while rejecting the anthropomorphic hypothesis, suggested

that they could nonethless have been symbols of divinities, or the spirits of the dead ("mânes des ancêtres" (Le Rouzic 1913, 18). But the final and most telling problem with the "déesse des morts" interpretation is the recognition that these stones were in fact re-used menhirs, and had not initially been intended for placement within chambered tombs (L'Helgouach 1997). They need not originally have had any special connection with funerary contexts. As L'Helgouach observed in his later writings, the process of reuse could be seen as the transfer of images from the world of the living to that of the dead, although he still identified the motif as a "divinité" (L'Helgouach 1997, 122).

SHOULDERED SLABS: THE STONE AS STATUE

A notable feature of the Ile Longue figure is the manner in which the form of the motif echoes and complements the form of the slab on which it is carved. There is evidence that the slab itself had been deliberately shaped to present an ogival outline with incurving sides and pointed top. The hair, indeed, sweeps back over the curved top of the stone (Péquart & Le Rouzic 1927, pl. 65). Hence, by extension, if the ogival carved motif represents the human form, then the shape of the stone itself must do so also. This brings us to the second category of human representations, those which rely not on carvings made on the surface of the block, but on the shape of the block itself.

In the megalithic tradition of northwest France the most striking example of an anthropomorphic slab is the massive granite block that the chamber of passage grave II at Le Petit Mont was built around (Lecornec 1994) (Fig. 2). The slab measures 4.3 metres in length by 3.4 metres wide. It has been carefully pecked to a regular surface and shaped with straight sides tapering towards a narrower base part, of which has been chipped away. The stone bears no carvings on its visible surface but the anthropomorphic form is indicated by the curved shoulders and the rounded, clearly identified head. Originally this stone would have

stood upright, as a stele or statue menhir. Excavations have shown that the passage grave (of which it forms the floor) was built over a low earthen long mound (Fig. 2). An empty socket at one end of the earthen mound may be the original emplacement for the stone (Lecornec 1994). At some subsequent stage it was felled to the ground and dragged to its present position, where the passage grave was built around it.

Shouldered stones have been identified – or claimed – in a growing number of chambered tombs in Brittany (L'Helgouach 1997). These tombs, mainly passage graves, date to the final centuries of the 5th millennium or the early centuries of the 4th millemnnium BC, implying that the standing stones are still older and belong probably to the mid 5th millennium BC. In some cases, the shouldered form of these blocks is an intentional outcome resulting from the pecking and shaping of at least the upper part of the stone. In other cases, however, stones of naturally shouldered form have been claimed to be anthropomorphic: that is to say, they have not been shaped, but have been selected because their natural shape suggests the human form. Among the clearest examples of this category of naturally shouldered menhir are the standing stones within passage graves A, B and C of cairn III on Ile Guennoc (Giot 1987; Le Roux 1998, 219). The stone within chamber C has a particularly convincing 'shouldered' form (Fig. 3, left), and the contention that these may have been considered human-like is supported by the fact that in all three chambers these stones were placed as free standing monoliths, not built into the side walls.

The shouldered stones of the Guennoc passage graves may have been thought to represent shadowy ancestors or supernatural beings: and unlike the other Breton monoliths referred to above they appear to have been located in a funerary context from the very outset. There is nothing to indicate that they have been recycled, or that they were orginally erected in the open air. The recognition of human shape in these stones does however become problematic if we extend the anthropomorphism to include less distinct examples such as the menhir of Men Ozac'h at Lilia. This isolated standing stone occupies a curious

position in a tidal inlet. It is deeply submerged at high tide, and only becomes visible at low tide, a situation which suggests it was erected during an early stage of the Neolithic period when sea level was significantly lower than today (Devoir 1912; Giot 1990). Neither the shape nor the size of the stone are in themselves especially remarkable, but this has not deterred some from perceiving "sa silhouette vaguement anthropomorphe" (Le Roux 1998, 219).

The Lilia menhir highlights the issues surrounding the identification of anthropomorphs in natural stone forms. Psychologists and anthropologists have argued that anthropomorphism is a basic tendency of human perception and understanding, and have noted the widespread and pervasive attribution of human characteristics to inanimate objects (Guthrie 1993). This observation has a long ancestry in western thought. Two hundred and fifty years ago, the Scottish philosopher David Hume observed "There is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious. We find human faces in the moon, armies in the clouds; and by a natural propensity, if not corrected by experience and reflection, ascribe malice or good-will to every thing, that hurts or pleases us. Hence… trees, mountains and streams are personified, and inanimate parts of nature acquire sentiment and passion" (Hume 1779). Such attributions are of course especially likely where the inanimate object has elements of a human shape. Art historian Ernst Gombrich noted the especial sensitivity of human perception to human forms: "Whenever anything remotely facelike enters our field of vision, we are alerted and respond" (Gombrich 1962, 87). Folklore adds another dimension to this argument in the frequent identification of prehistoric standing stones as petrified humans, turned into stone for some impious act. Thus the Merry Maidens, a stone circle in western Cornwall, were thought to be a group of young girls turned to stone as punishment for dancing on the Sabbath (Hunt 1865). Such widespread folk traditions may not be of great antiquity but they highlight the ease with which standing stones –

especially narrow pillar-like slabs of approximately human dimensions – lend themselves to an anthropomorphic interpretation.

In conclusion, among the megalithic blocks used by Neolithic communities in northwest Europe we have effectively a smooth transition from those which are shapd or carved in human form, and those which without any added human characteristics may nonetheless in some sense have been considered humanlike:

- the carved motifs on the surfaces of megalithic slabs, such as those of Le Déhus or Ile Longue;
- carefully shaped shouldered stones such as the Petit Mont floor stone; naturally shouldered slabs which may have been selected for their humanlike form, such as the Ile Guennoc menhirs;
- and finally, an extensive and diverse group of standing stones with no specifically human features, but which both ethnography and folklore indicate may also have been considered to stand for humans in some way.

It is clear, in sum, that megalithic blocks do not have to have human form or features to function as anthropomorphic in the eyes and minds of the beholders. In order to pursue the implications of this conclusion, let us first turn to the issue of statue-menhirs, where the intentional creation of a human form is generally not in question.

STATUE MENHIRS

The statue menhirs of southern France are unambiguously anthropomorphic, in that they are shaped or carved with clearly human features. That in itself does not make them straightforward representations of individuals living or dead, or of anthropomorphic deities, but it does suggest that these stones, or the subjects they depict, were shaped to portray certain humanlike qualities.

In terms of naturalistic representation, the statue-menhirs of southern France reach their apogee in the Rouergue group. These are true statue-

menhirs in the sense that they are three dimensional forms carved in the round, as opposed to the flat two-dimensional representations which are more accurately described as stelae. That said, viewed as a series the Rouergue menhirs are simply rounded blocks of stone on which human features have been inscribed; clothing and accessories are as prominent, if not more so, than arms and legs, and the face, if it is indicated at all, is squeezed into a small triangular or rectangular space at the top of the stone. No attempt has been made to separate the head from the body of the block. Indeed, in the last analysis it is difficult to decide whether these are schematic representations of human forms or whether instead it is the blocks that are being represented as animate.

One of the most striking of the Rouergat statue-menhirs is the figure from Saint Sernin-sur-Rance (D'Anna 1977, 41; Serres 1997, 262; Philippon 2002) (Fig. 4). The sandstone slab has been carefully worked to give parallel sides and a rounded or pointed top. Facial features are schematic: small circular hollows for the eyes, and a straight, beak-like nose flanked by parallel horizontal lines that may indicate face paint or tattoos. Below the face, the series of curving deeply incised lines indicates a parallel-stranded necklace from which, or from a separate cord, is suspended an enigmatic Y-shaped object encountered on a number of these statue-menhirs. Small roundels represent the breasts and indicate that this is a female figure; others are male. Arms and legs are indicated schematically, and both appear foreshortened. It has been argued, in the case of the legs, that this may imply that these are representations of seated individuals (D'Anna 1977, 171; Serres 1997, 37-38). Clothing consists a long pleated robe (more apparent on the back of the figure), crimped around the middle by a prominent double-strand belt or girdle.

The Rouergue statue menhirs are not large – the Saint-Sernin-sur-Rance example measures only 1.2 m tall, and is hence a little below life size. Most had been disturbed or displaced when first discovered, and little is known of their original context of display. There is no evidence to suggest that they stood within or adjacent to settlements, however, nor that they were raised as grave markers next to burials.

The Rouergue menhirs did not appear from nowhere, fully-formed, but are part of a longer and geographically broader tradition of human representations in stone. Although dating is difficult and necessarily imprecise, the Rouergue statue-menhirs were fashioned probably in the 3rd millennium BC. On the opposite of the Rhône valley in Provence, a different type of human representation is found in the Trets basin and the Durance valley (D'Anna 1977, 212ff). This consists of flat rectangular stone plaques with straight sides converging towards a pointed base. The broader, upper part of the plaque has a decorated border (perhaps indicating a head covering or even hair) framing a sunken central panel that represents the face. Eyes are sometimes represented by small round bosses or shallow circular hollows, while a bar-like nose descends from the top of the frame. Laboratory examination of examples from La Bastidonne revealed that the carved frame surrounding the face had been embellished by red paint. Simpler examples from Château-Blanc at Ventabren, without frame or facial features, had been painted red all over (Walter *et al*. 1997). It is significant, and a little surprising, that the painted decoration seems not to have been used to pick out facial features. The schematic or blank nature of faces on the stelae and statue-menhirs of southern France, including even the Rouergue group, is a striking feature of this group of stones.

More is known of the original setting of the Trets stelae than of the Rouergue statue menhirs. Those from La Bastidonne were associated with cremation graves; the Château-Blanc stelae came from tumuli containing inhumation burials. Hence they may have been grave markers, though whether they were representations of living or deceased individuals, or of supernatural or mythological beings, remains open to debate. Both Trets and Rouergue groups are generally attributed to the 3rd millennium BC (or at earliest the late 4th millennium) but the origin of the tradition itself may lie a millennium earlier. There is evidence for an early phase in which stones were selected for their naturally anthropomorphic form, and erected with little additional shaping or modification. This was followed by a scond phase in which menhirs

were shaped but not carved, and finally by the carving or sculpting of the surfaces (Rodriguez 1998). A worked limestone slab from Chabrillon in Provence may represent the first stages in the transition from natural forms to intentionally shaped slabs. The stone has been worked so as to disengage a bulbous lump which may represent the head. It is argued to have come from a Chasséen context and would hence be dated to the late 5th or early 4th millennium BC (Saintot 1998). The shaping of the stone is not in doubt, though the contention that it represents a schematic human form is less compelling. Taken as a whole, however, the evidence from southern France suggests that the tradition of anthropomorphic representations arose from the perception of human features in natural forms. In northwest France, by contrast, the evidence does not at present suggest that natural forms preceded human carvings (Scarre 2007). This may imply differences in the way the communities of these two regions projected anthropomorphic features onto the natural world; but it is equally possible that it relates merely to traditions of representation, to the degree to which different communities thought it necessary to convey human images in realistic fashion. Underlying both is the common tendency to attribute anthropomorphic qualities to pillar-like blocks of stone.

GENDERED STONES

Anthropomorphism, as we have seen, does not demand the depiction of complete human bodies, but may be restricted to shaping or inscribing a few characteristic human elements. Facial features, hands or feet, or sexual indicators may all be recognisable anthropomorphic indicators, even where they occur in the absence of a complete human outline.

Towards the end of the Neolithic period in northwest France the imagery found within the megalithic tombs changes. In place of shouldered blocks or schematic representations of complete human bodies, the later imagery includes pairs of conical bosses that are

generally held to depict female breasts. These are found at six sites, five of which – Tressé, Kergüntuil, Prajou Menhir, Mougau Bihan and Mein Goarec – fall typologically within the category of *allées couvertes*: elongated parallel-sided chambers formed of massive orthostats and capstones (Shee Twohig 1981, 70-75; Kinnes 1980; Villes 1998). In three of the five cases, the paired bosses are located in a separate cell at the rear of the chamber, which may have functioned as a kind of shrine for offerings. At Kergüntuil and Mougau Bihan, however, the bosses are found within the chamber itself. Another feature of these pairs of bosses is that they do not occur singly: there are two pairs, one above the other, at Mougau Bihan; two pairs side by side at Prajou Menhir and Tressé; and no fewer than eight pairs side by side, and spread across two adjacent orthostats, at Kergüntuil (Fig. 5). Several of the Kergüntuil breast pairs are accompanied by a semicircular loop that extends below them as if pendant from them. In two examples, the loops consist of small individualised bosses carved in relief and connected together. It is generally recognised that these loops represent necklaces, the small bosses indicating the individual beads (Shee Twohig 1981, 73). Hence the paired bosses and pendant loops can be interpreted as female breasts with necklaces beneath, the only oddity of this arrangement being that the necklaces seem not to be hung around the neck but to be suspended from the breasts. A sixth example of this same motif, breasts and a pendant necklace, is found in a different category of tomb, the lateral entry grave of Crec'h Quillé (L'Helgouach 1993, 16).

These later Neolithic carvings differ from the earlier anthropomorphic representations in a number of respects. First, they constitute not entire human forms but only one isolated element. Their disembodied character is highlighted by the close spacing of breast pairs at Kergüntuil, Prajou Menhir and Tressé, and by the positioning of breast pairs above each other on the surface of the same slab at Mougau Bihan and Kergüntuil. Second, the slabs that carry these motifs do not appear to have been introduced into these tombs as reused stones, but to have been carved *in situ*. This is indicated by the manner in which the series

of eight breast pairs within the Kergüntuil chamber extends across the surfaces of two adjacent stones. There is nothing to suggest that they could originally have been free-standing menhirs. Third, unlike the earlier images, these carvings are very clearly gendered: they carry explicitly female messages.

Wider reference for these carvings can be sought in two separate directions. The first is a group of four three-dimensional figures from Brittany and the Channel Islands. The most striking of these is the statue-menhir at Le Câtel on Guernsey, a complete if schematic three-dimensional human figure which shares with the megalithic slabs the presence of prominent rounded bosses representing the breasts (Fig. 3, right). A necklace is also shown, positioned as if worn round the neck. Breasts figure too on the figure from Saint Martin, also on Guernsey, which is thought to have originated as a Neolithic statue-menhir but was subsequently recarved in Gallo-Roman or Medieval times (Kinnes 1980). Two further fragmentary figures, from Kermené and Trévoux in Brittany, belong to the same series. They have breasts and necklaces, and in the case of the Kermené example, short stubby arms (Giot 1960; 1973). None of the four was found in a secure context and they are hence difficult to date, but comparison with the carved breasts in Breton megalithic tombs, and the similar figurations in Paris basin tombs, suggest that a Late Neolithic attribution is most likely.

The Paris basin figures provide a second line of reference. The most spectacular of these are the human forms carved in the soft chalk of the *hypogées* (rock cut tombs) of the Marne (Villes 1998). Three of these (Coizard 23 & two examples from Coizard 24) are complete human outlines, with schematic faces (eyebrows and bar-like descending nose, a hint of the mouth in two cases and of eyes in the third). They also have necklaces, and, in two cases, prominent rounded breasts. A fourth representation (Courjeonnet 2), appears to show only the upper part of the human figure, with a hafted axe beneath which may be part of the same composition though it is possible that axe was added to figure or vice versa (Villes 1998, 33). The occasional presence of breasts indicates

that some at least of these figures are feminine. As on the Câtel statue-menhir, the breasts are here not disembodied elements but parts of complete human representations. Paradoxically, a short distance to the east, a number of disembodied breasts (paired bosses associated with necklaces) are found in the *allées couvertes* of the lower Seine valley. These must be related to the Breton series, and it is possible that one set inspired the other. If this were the case, then the fact that the necklaces are placed more 'naturally' in the Paris basin tombs, as if worn around the neck, whereas those of the Breton tombs are depicted as if suspended from the breasts, may indicate that the Breton series is derived from the Paris basin series (Villes 1998, 42). Links between the two regions are demonstrated by the occasional presence of other Breton motifs in Paris basin tombs, though here the transmission was probably in the other direction ('palette' motifs from Breuil-en-Vexin "La Cave aux Fées"; rectangular motif with finial from Marly-le-Roi "Mississipi" (Shee Twohig 1981, 136; L'Helgouach 1986).

BODIES, BODY PARTS AND ANTHROPOMORPHIC STONES

If the Breton breast motifs are indeed derived from the Paris basin, then their ultimate origin may lie in the complete human figures carved in the Marne hypogées. The connections that can be drawn with statue menhirs from northwestern France represented by the Le Câtel menhir also place the pairs of breasts within the setting of the complete human form. Yet, as has already been observed, the tight spacing of pairs of breasts side by side in some of the Breton tombs, and occasionally one above another, suggests that these are not in fact elements of complete human forms. There is little likelihood, for example, that the breasts are the only surviving remains of whole human depictions that were originally completed in paint or charcoal. The close spacing of the breasts simply does not allow sufficient room for that. They can only always have been disembodied elements: body parts, not bodies.

What, then, is being represented here? Do the breasts stand, in some sense, for complete bodies? Or was their carving undertaken in order to imbue these megalithic slabs with certain anthropomorphic properties? Crucial to this debate is the relationship of the motif to the material. We have already observed that human forms in earlier Neolithic Brittany fall into two categories: those carved on the surface of the stone, and those where the stone itself was shaped into a human form. The latter case is exemplified by the 'shouldered' figure reused as a floorstone in the chamber of Petit Mont II. This is not a human form carved on a stone surface but the conversion of the entire slab into a human form. The same observation can be applied to the Le Câtel statue-menhir and its analogues in northwest France. It does not hold so convincingly, however, for the statue-menhirs of southern France since, as we have seen, their evocation of the human form appears limited. Is the block of stone being transformed into the schematic image of a human individual, living or dead, or was the addition of carved human attributes intended to bring the block of stone to life, or to make it animate in some way? Ethnographic accounts provide vivid testimony of the rituals frequently associated with such carved images that are designed to activate them. Such rituals address the figurations as if they were animate images able to see, to hear, to accept offerings, and to respond (e.g. Gell 1998).

The disembodied female breasts present additional enigmas. Where only parts of whole bodies are represented, it might be logical to conclude that only a restricted set of human attributes – those connected with these particular anatomical elements – are being evoked. Thus breasts may have been carved in order to draw out and emphasise feminine qualities that were considered to lie within the granite blocks. Breasts also carry associations of nurturing and feeding, and their presence in a funerary context may have been connected with cycles of death and rebirth (cf. Hodder 1990, 242; Bloch & Parry 1982; Tilley & Thomas 1993, 316). Marija Gimbutas saw in them another manifestation of the Neolithic Goddess religion. We do not need to accept her speculative

religious scenario in order to agree with her that, in the megalithic tombs of northwest France, "[t]he breasts are not nourishing the living alone; more importantly, they are regenerating the dead" (Gimbutas 1989, 40-41).

This is far cry from the concept of statue-menhirs carved to represent ancestors or even living individuals. The breasts and necklaces in the Breton tombs belong to an altogether different discourse, one in which the focus was not on complete human forms but on specific anthropomorphic properties in a funerary context. These are not the 'déesses des morts' of earlier writers, but expressions of a belief, perhaps, that the dead were to be nourished and fed. What all these stones have in common – the shouldered slabs, the naturally human shapes, the three-dimensional images – is the quality of metaphor. Their anthropomorphic character signals clearly to the observer their reference to people, to human social beings. Yet they are more than mute representations, as we have seen. For the societies that created them, they did not simply *depict* human qualities and attributes, but probably embodied them as well.

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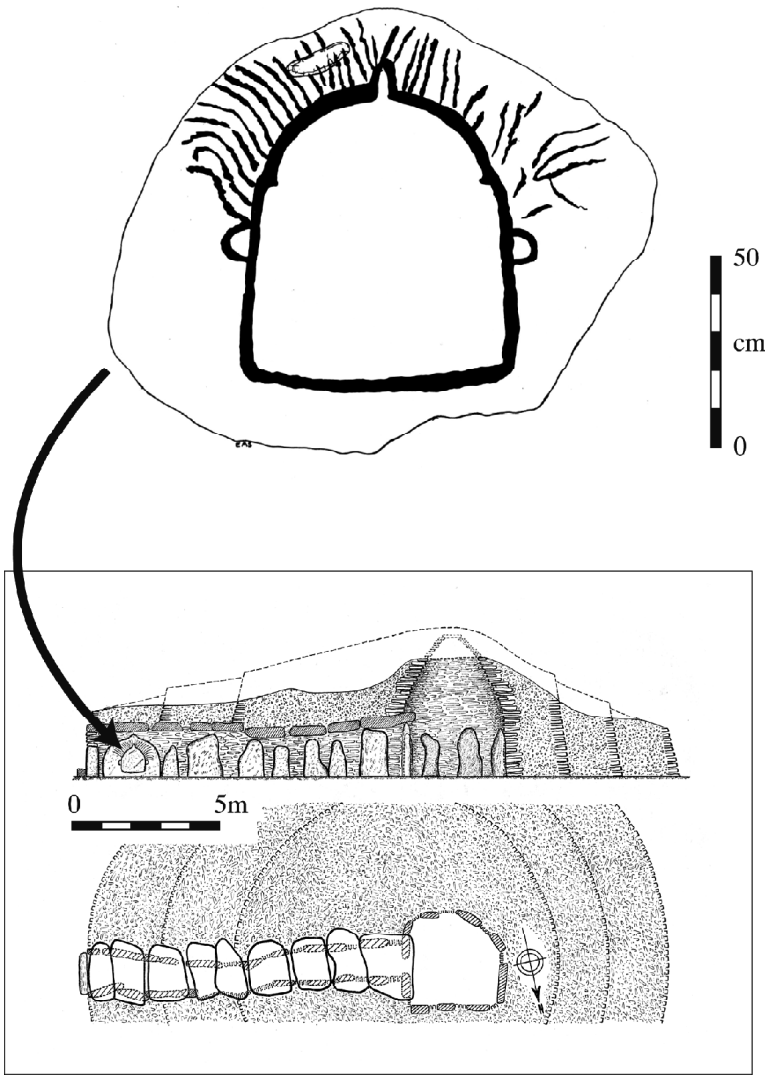

FIG. 1 – Ile Longue, Brittany: carved motif on passage orthostat L2 variously interpreted as a “buckler”, a divinity, or a phallus. (Above after Shee Twohig; below from Le Rouzic).

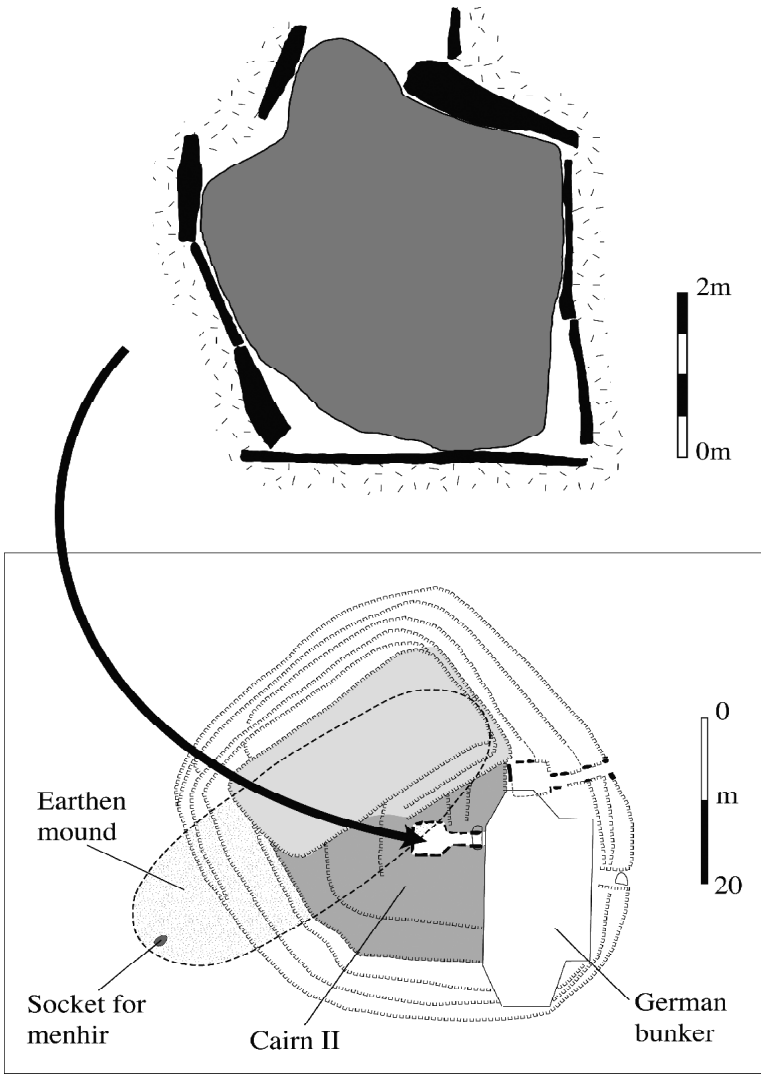

FIG. 2 – Petit-Mont, Brittany: 'shouldered' menhir re-used as the floor-stone of passage grave II. (After Lecornec).

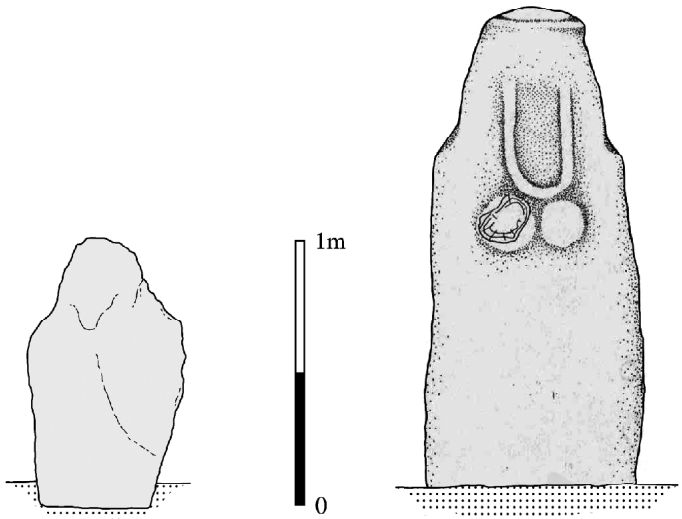

FIG. 3 – Shouldered slab from passage grave C in cairn III at Ile Guennoc (left); Le Câtel statue-menhir, Guernsey (right). (After Le Roux (left) and Shee Twohig(right)).

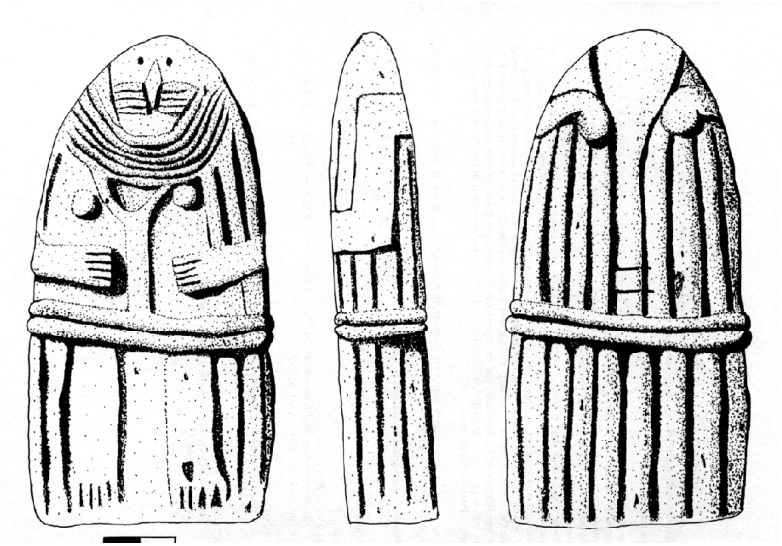

FIG. 4 – Statue-menhir of Saint Sernin-sur-Rance, Aveyron (France). (From D'Anna 1977).

FIG. 5 – Row of paired breast carvings with necklaces below, from *allée couverte* of Kergüntuil in northern Brittany. (Photo: Chris Scarre).